

Rezensionen – Comptes rendus – Reviews

Rawski, Evelyn S.: *Early Modern China and Northeast Asia: Cross-Border Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, 349 pp., Maps, Tables, Bibliography, Index, ISBN 978-1-1070-9308-9.

Reviewed by **Hang Lin**, Department of History, Hangzhou Normal University, 2318 Yuhangtang Rd., Canqian, Hangzhou 311121, China. E-mail: hang.lin@hznu.edu.cn

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The fifteen years after the antiphonal statements of Evelyn S. Rawski (1996) and Ping-ti Ho (1998) have witnessed a growing influence of the “New Qing History”, which examines the history of China’s Manchu Qing dynasty (1644–1911) in the larger context of Inner Asian history and believes that a comparative approach based on non-Chinese-language sources can open new horizons for appreciating the Manchu people and the Qing. In this current book, Rawski moves a step forward to develop the concept of “De-Centering China” that aims at rethinking Chinese history “from the perspective of the periphery, and not the core” (p. 1). Challenging the conventional notion that treats China’s history as a linear narrative centered on the Central Plain and the Han Chinese, Rawski forcefully argues in this revisionist history that the historical routes of China since the sixteenth century can be better understood by viewing it in the larger regional framework of northeast Asia, i. e. Korea, Japan, Jurchen/Manchu, and Mongol.

The nucleus of this meticulously studied and eloquently written book progresses through five chapters, which are grouped into two parts, bracketed by a penetrating introduction and an extensive epilogue. Recounting the history of China’s northeast frontier, in particular the Korean peninsula and the Japanese archipelago prior to the European traders in the late sixteenth century, Chapter 1 situates northeast Asia with respect to China’s core region in the Central Plain and argues that the creation of Korean and Japanese states were “through intense interaction with other entities on the steppe and the Central Plain” (p. 21). Specifically, Rawski divides this long history into three phases. The first phase, which lasted until the rise of the Tang (618–907) in the early seventh century, saw the first formation of autochthonous states on China’s northeast frontier. Although built on knowledge disseminated by the Central Plain, these states interacted more intensively with other polities at the periphery than with China’s core region. Following the decline of the Tang, power shifted to northeast Asian states (i. e. Khitan Liao 907–1125, Jurchen Jin 1115–1234, Mongol Yuan 1206–1368) that used their military advantage to defeat regimes based in the

Central Plain and ruled large empires that encompassed both nomadic and agrarian subjects. The third phase began in the sixteenth century when maritime trade across northeast Asia expanded and Korea and Japan began to behave as confident players, not subordinates, and eventually challenged the traditional Sino-centric world order.

Constructing a country's narrative against the background of regional events usually treated within national histories, Rawski explores in Chapter 2 the transformative new practices that were adopted by China and Japan through cross-border commercial activities and multi-state competition between 1550 and 1650. After a survey of the invasion of Korea by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537–1598) in 1592 and the rise of the Jurchen/Manchu in the first half of the seventeenth century, the focus of this chapter is then laid on the consequences of the increasing trading exchanges initiated with European traders, colonizers, and missionaries. The enormous political, economic, and cultural transformations in China, Japan, and Korea, as Rawski cogently argues, “make the 1550–1650 period ‘early modern’” (p. 62) and “Qing and Japan adopted the perspectives of early modern European states” (p. 101). It is such perspectives that stimulated the Tokugawa shogunate and the Qing court to carry out large exploration and mapping projects, which later provided them necessary knowledge in negotiating with Russia, the new power in northeast Asia.

As the territorial awareness grew, the cultural boundaries delineating national self-images also rose and intellectuals in China, Korea, and Japan became increasingly prone to articulating their distinctive national identities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as demonstrated in the three chapters in Part 2. Chapter 3 is devoted to state rituals, which aim at “legitimat[ing] political systems and creat[ing] symbolic communities” and thus “reflect interstate tensions as well as each state's desire to assert its identity” (pp. 105–106). Keenly examining various state rituals in China, Korea, and Japan, respectively, Rawski notes that state rituals practiced by the Qing were an eclectic mixture of Central Plain cultural heritage of emperorship interspersed with heavy shamanic rites originated from northeast Asian traditions and Tibetan Buddhism. In a same manner, Japan's state ritual system was merged with elements of indigenous cults and continental influences, characterized by Buddhist-Shinto doctrines, while in Korea with the political transition from the Ming (1368–1644) to the Qing in China the established Confucian order shifted to an idealized new order in which Korean played the central role.

Similar tensions between indigenous traditions and Chinese (Confucian) norms can also be observed in royal successions and kinship structures, as treated in Chapter 4. Their northeast Asian origins of the Manchu led to their initial reliance on collegial rule but they soon adopted the Chinese patrilineal

kinship system and eventually the Chinese principle of father-son succession was institutionalized. The Korean and Japanese responses to the introduction of Confucian norms concerning inheritance and succession took different paths. Japan's kinship practices were marked with both certain indigenous traditions and some accommodations to the patrilineality of Chinese style. Korea, on the other hand, developed an extreme form of patrilineage among the new *yangban* elite, while the throne was overwhelmingly manipulated by the natal kinsmen of the royal senior women. Chapter 5 analyzes the discourse of *hua* (civilized) and *yi* (barbarian) propounded by Chinese, Korean, and Japanese. The Qing rulers asserted that "Heaven chose a ruling house on the basis of virtue, not ethnicity" (p. 222). Koreans and Japanese, in contrast, cited the *yi* origins of the Manchu to reject the political legitimacy of the Qing and thus asserted their own versions of the Asian world order.

Broad in scope and conscientious in detail, this book represents Prof. Rawski's culmination of a labor of devotion and love in advocating studying the history of China through a new perspective beyond national histories. This perspective is two-folded. First, it calls for contemplating events in which the Chinese heartland was encompassed in historical movements of regional or global dimensions. Here, China's interrelations with Korea and Japan were casted into a broader northeast Asian context. Rawski persuasively argues that geographical contiguity and intense political, economic, and cultural interactions between China, the Korean peninsula, and the Japanese archipelago justify considering them together in a regional and global context. This enlarged historical version extends beyond northeast Asia since arrival of European traders and missionaries further intensified cultural contacts and stimulated dynamic political and economic changes. On the other hand, it moves away from the Central Plain and direct the focus on the periphery, emphasizing that it is the interaction between borderlands and the Central Plain that functioned "as the dynamic engine behind the long-term development of China's imperial formation" (p. 225). Without a proper appreciation of the origins of the Manchu and their close connections to Inner Asian peoples such as the Mongol, there is no doubt that our understanding of the Qing state rituals and royal succession would be incomplete.

Another precious strength of Rawski's book lies in her source base which goes far beyond Chinese material – she has made use of a staggering array of sources, including Manchu-language archives, the Veritable Records of the Korean Choson dynasty (1392–1910), and Japanese primary sources on Hideyoshi's invasions of Korea. Reading and comparing multiple sources, as Rawski cogently points out, "provide[s] valuable information that was censored or edited out of Chinese texts, and reveal[s] other views that are absent from the

diplomatic correspondence between states” (p. 14). Rawski also consults abundant secondary literature in Asian and Western languages, which present non-Chinese perspectives and offer divergent interpretations – a glimpse at the extensive 61-page bibliography will enhance readers’ marvel at Rawski’s erudition.

Although few would read through the bibliography, the copy-editing and proof-reading could have been more careful, as one may expect from a Cambridge University Press publication – numerous mistakes in Chinese titles pepper the text, along with obvious and not-so-obvious printers’ devils: for example on p. 275, p. 277, p. 285, p. 297, p. 312, several unnecessary spaces appear in the titles Chinese literature; the Chinese name of the Jurchen is rendered differently on p. 275 and p. 283; in the title of an article by Pu Wencheng on p. 305, three Chinese characters were erroneously printed, to name only a few.

Certainly, these minor quibbles should by no means detract the distinguished accomplishment Rawski has made in her ground-breaking study of why and how was the northeast Asian region, in particular Korea and Japan, of irreplaceable importance not only as frontier for the Chinese Central Plain states but also as vital players in the shared geopolitical arena. Discarding the conventional view that Korea and Japan were subordinate actors within a China-dominated world, Rawski has vigorously shown that they were in fact interrelated and one’s actions often stimulated direct responses from the others. This perspective is immensely valuable and is bound to inspire more future studies on the dynamic region of northeast Asia. For readers with more profound interest on the topic, another recent publication by David C. Kang (2010) is warmly recommended to be read in combination.

References

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